

# MAHONING COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY 1 - DECEMBER 31, 2022



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# EXECUTIVE TEAM

## A MESSAGE FROM MAHONING COUNTY PROSECUTOR GINA DEGENOVA

Thank you for your interest in the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office and for taking the time to read the 2022 edition of our Annual Report. 2022 was an eventful and productive year and I am honored to address each of you in my new role as Mahoning County Prosecutor.

Our team of lawyers in the Criminal Division prosecute cases each day, ensuring there are consequences for those who violate the law. This work is so important as crime injures not only the victim, but also the community as a whole. In 2022, 773 new criminal cases and matters were opened and 930 cases and matters were disposed of. In addition, our criminal prosecutions enabled us to seek the forfeiture of \$107,210.95 derived from criminal acts or associations and further caused the collection of over \$237,632.66 in restitution paid to victims of crime. This is a significant increase from the funds collected last year.

Our team also remains committed to protecting the rights of victims as recognized by the constitutional enactment of Marsy's Law. Our victim coordinators make thousands of contacts with victims and witnesses of crime each year, helping them cope with everything from the loss of a loved one to documenting and applying for restitution. In 2022, we had 7,605 contacts with victims, their families and witnesses.

Our team of lawyers in the Civil Division serve as legal counsel to Mahoning County elected officials, public officials, local law enforcement agencies, members of county boards and township trustees, and fiscal officers in each of our fourteen townships. This year, 2,353 legal matters were handled and 1,198 contracts were reviewed/drafted/approved. Our Delinquent Tax Department filed 281 foreclosure complaints on behalf of the Mahoning County Treasurer and various County and local government land banks.

Community engagement and the creation of important service and safety initiatives also play an important role in our daily operations. A successful prosecutor must not only have the fortitude to hold those who violate the law accountable, but must also be willing to make time to serve our community and help to prevent crime. This year, I, and members of my team, presented to student and resident groups on various crime prevention, law enforcement and other community engagement topics. We also developed a senior citizen safety and wellness calendar, attended various community events to raise awareness of our Special Needs Registry and participated in a community roundtable discussion on crime, mental health and safety.

The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office is committed to protecting and serving the citizens and taxpayers of Mahoning County. I look forward to serving this community in the upcoming year.



# CRIMINAL DIVISION

## FELONY DIVISION

The Criminal Division is responsible for the prosecution of all serious adult offenders in the Mahoning County Common Pleas Court. In general, felony offenses are crimes that carry a potential prison sentence. Those crimes include high-value theft, possession of illicit drugs with a high potential for abuse, drug trafficking, domestic violence, robbery, burglary, rape, human trafficking, and murder. Except for murder (an “unclassified” felony), the seriousness of felony offenses is denoted by degrees. For example, a felony of the 1st degree is a more serious felony offense, while a felony of the 5th degree is less serious. More serious felony offenses carry the possibility of longer prison sentences.

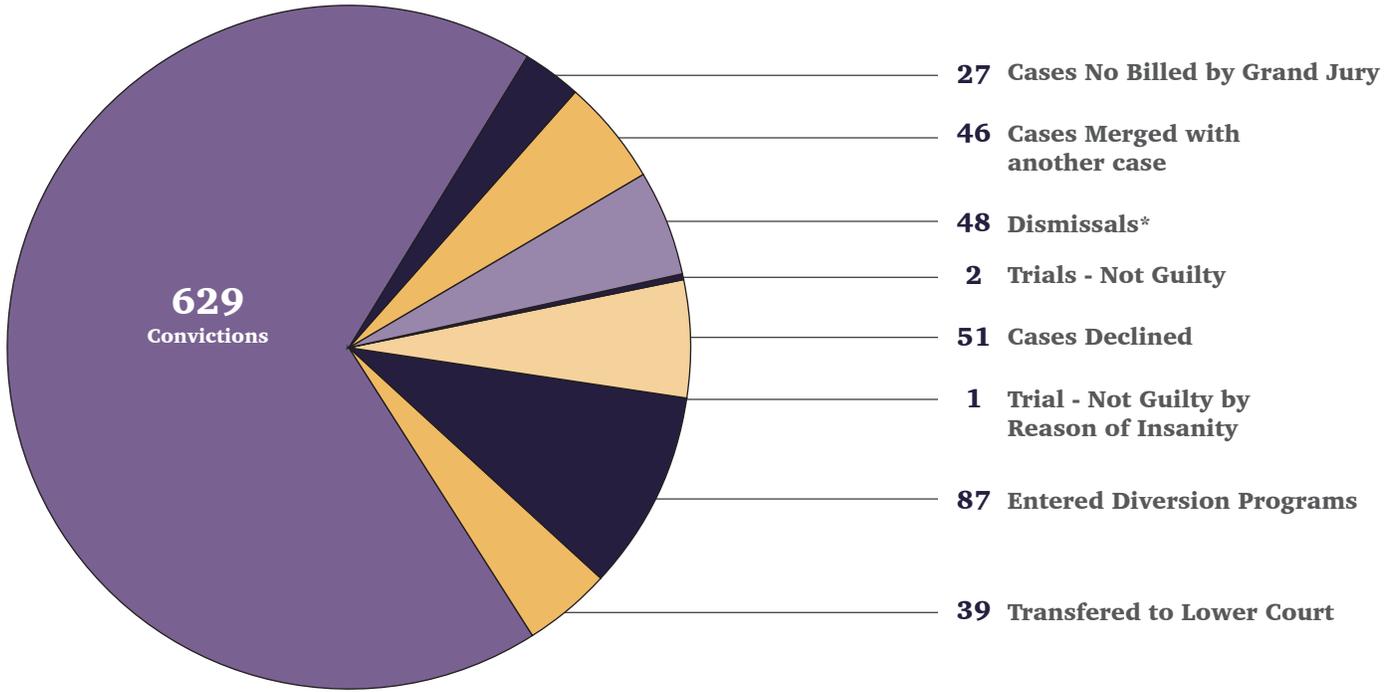
## GRAND JURY

The Mahoning County Prosecutor’s Office screens a large volume of cases that the office receives, including offenses that range from drug possession and theft to aggravated robbery and kidnapping. A majority of the cases received from law enforcement are reviewed by the Grand Jury Prosecutor who prepares the case for review by obtaining reports from law enforcement, securing video evidence, and requesting forensic laboratory reports. Requested records are uploaded into Matrix, our document management system, for use in discovery and case preparation.

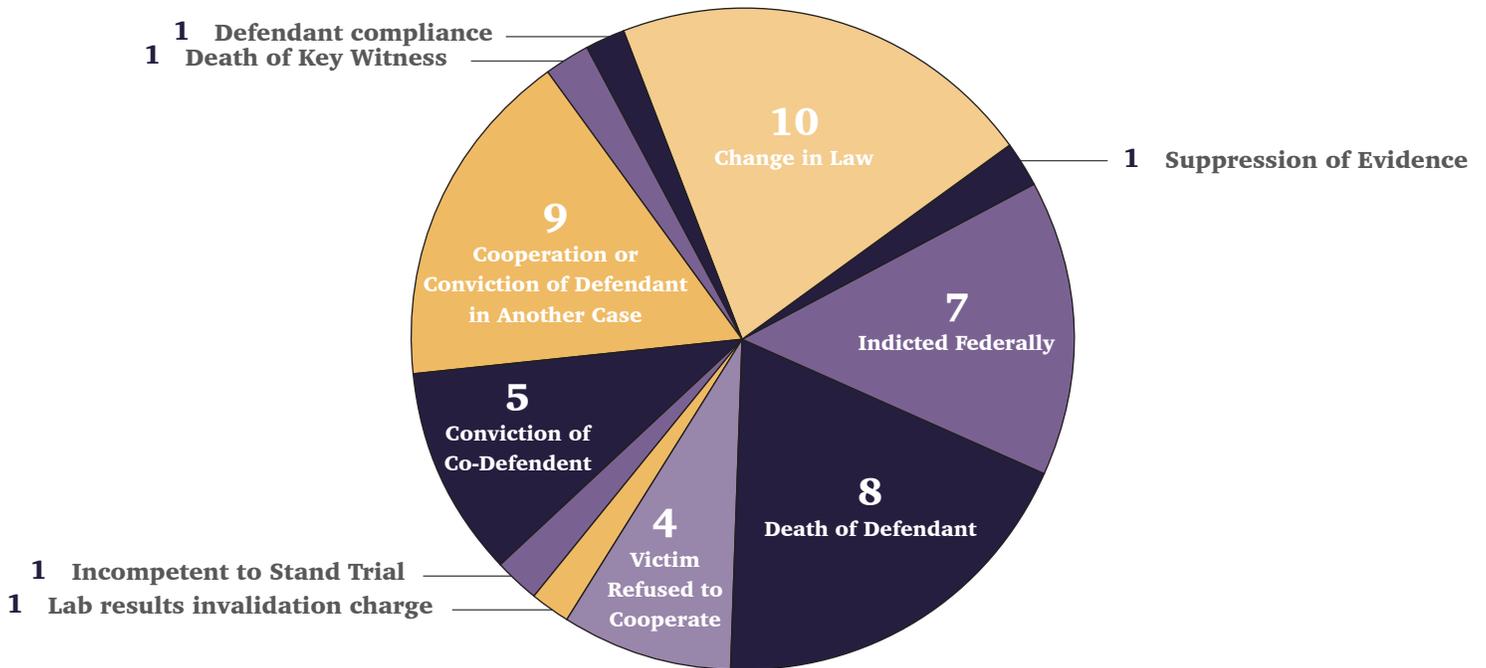
## In 2022, Assistant Prosecutors:

- Presented **792** cases to the Grand Jury;
- Returned **765** true bills (indictments) and **27** no bills; and
- Questioned **307** witnesses during Grand Jury prosecutions.

## In 2022, Criminal Assistant Prosecutors disposed of 930 cases:



### \*48 Dismissals:



# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN UNIT (VAWA)

The VAWA Unit is funded through a grant program administered by the Office of Criminal Justice Services. The purpose of this unit is to vertically prosecute crimes against women and children, including sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, and dating violence. Through vertical prosecution, assistant prosecutors assigned to VAWA handle cases from start to finish by consulting with law enforcement during investigations, presenting cases to the Grand Jury, and appearing in court at pre-trial hearings, plea hearings, trials, and sentencing hearings. VAWA Prosecutors devote all of their professional time to this docket and are very knowledgeable about the unique challenges of such cases. They often prosecute crimes against victims who are reluctant to report sexual or physical abuse and are fearful of their abusers. Victims may be related to their abusers and many victims in these cases are children. In addition to assisting victims through the criminal justice process, VAWA Prosecutors present juries with medical and forensic evidence, correspond with social workers working with victims, and provide training for law enforcement regarding cases of sexual assault and domestic abuse.

## **In 2022, the VAWA Unit:**

- Screened **133** cases;
- Presented **109** cases to the Grand Jury;
  - **101** cases were true billed (indicted);
  - **8** cases were no-billed (not indicted);
- Disposed of **85** cases; and
- Conducted **4** jury trials resulting in **3** convictions and **1** not guilty.

## APPELLATE

All defendants convicted in the Mahoning County Courts enjoy an appeal of right to the Seventh District Court of Appeals. This includes all felony and misdemeanor convictions, as well as any juvenile who was adjudicated delinquent in the Juvenile Court. The Appellate Division's primary role is to represent the State of Ohio in those appellate cases and to seek affirmation of those criminal convictions or juvenile adjudications. Representation in such appeals include the filing of written briefs and/or memoranda and often include the presentation of oral arguments to the Appellate Courts. The Appellate Division seeks affirmation of defendants' convictions and juveniles' adjudications to the fullest extent of the law. The Appellate Division is also responsible for all post-trial capital defendants. This includes responding to and prosecuting all direct appeals, post-conviction petitions, and clemency reviews before the Ohio Parole Board.

### **In 2022, the Appellate Division:**

- **Handled 74 appeals in the Seventh District and Ohio Supreme Courts;**
- **Filed 32 merit briefs;**
- **Conducted 11 oral arguments; and**
- **Filed/responded to 14 post-conviction petitions and/or writs.**

## JUVENILE DIVISION

The Juvenile Division works to ensure that minors who violate the law are punished and rehabilitated. The cases handled within the Juvenile Division range from truancy and traffic to school threats, rape and other violent felonies. The goal in these cases is to protect Mahoning County from juvenile delinquency, while at the same time preventing the juvenile offenders from becoming the next generation of defendants in the adult criminal system.

### **In 2022, the Juvenile Division:**

- **Screened 411 cases; and**
- **Filed 287 delinquency complaints.**

# SPECIALIZED COURTS AND DIVERSIONARY PROGRAMS

In Mahoning County, a variety of specialized treatment courts and diversionary programs are available, many of which are long-standing and highly successful. Our treatment courts include Drug Court, Veterans Court and Mental Health Court and provide specific types of help to those who are facing criminal charges. Our Diversionary Programs also include Intervention in Lieu of Conviction and Theft Diversion. The diversionary programs give eligible low-level, non-violent offenders an opportunity to obtain a dismissal of the charge(s) after successfully completing all program requirements.

In 2022, **87** individuals entered diversionary programs.

## MAHONING COUNTY COURTS

Criminal Division prosecutors assigned to one of the four County courts in Mahoning County prosecute misdemeanor and traffic offenses committed within Mahoning County. These County Courts include:

- Court No. 2 located in Boardman Township with jurisdiction over misdemeanors committed within Boardman Township.
- Court No. 3 located in Sebring with jurisdiction over misdemeanors committed within Smith, Ellsworth, Berlin, Green and Goshen Townships, the City of Sebring and the Villages of Beloit and Washingtonville.
- Court No. 4 located in Austintown with jurisdiction over misdemeanors committed within Austintown, Milton and Jackson Townships and the Village of Craig Beach.
- Court No. 5 located in Canfield with jurisdiction over misdemeanors committed within Canfield and Beaver Townships and the City of Canfield.

### **In 2022, the County Court Division:**

- Processed **2,989** misdemeanor cases; and
- Processed **10,844** traffic cases

## RESTITUTION

Crime victims are entitled to restitution. A sentencing judge may order a convicted offender to pay for financial losses stemming from the crime. In 2022, our criminal prosecutions enabled the collection of over **\$237,632.66** in restitution paid to victims.

## FORFEITURES

Under R.C. 2981.02(A), three categories of property are subject to forfeiture: (1) contraband involved in an offense; (2) proceeds derived from or acquired through the commission of an offense; and (3) an instrumentality used in or intended to be used in any felony or, when specifically authorized by statute or ordinance, in a misdemeanor when the use is sufficient to warrant forfeiture. If property becomes subject to forfeiture under one of the scenarios referenced above, the proceeds are divided between law enforcement officials who participated in the criminal investigation and the prosecutor's office for prosecuting the case.

In 2022, our criminal prosecutions enabled us to seek the forfeiture of over **\$107,210.95** derived from criminal acts or associations.



# VICTIM/WITNESS SERVICES

The Victim/Witness Services Division is a section of the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office. This Division is comprised of victim/witness coordinators who serve victims and witnesses in the criminal and juvenile divisions. Each coordinator provides information and support to crime victims and witnesses as their cases proceed through the judicial process. The goal of this Division is to help victims and witnesses understand their rights and responsibilities so that they can make intelligent choices about what is best for them.

## In 2022, Victim/Witness coordinators:

- Had **7,605** communications with victims and witnesses of crime;
- Sent out **7,466** notifications of criminal justice events;
- Made **350** referrals to other victim services programs;
- Had **1,397** communications regarding restitution assistance; and
- Had **3,694** communications regarding victim impact statements.



## NOTABLE CRIMINAL CASES

### *State of Ohio v. Shainquon Sharpe and Taquashon Ray*

A jury found Shainquon Sharpe & Taquashon Ray guilty of the November 2018 shooting deaths of Edward Morris, Valarcia Blair, and their three-month-old son, Tariq. Sharpe and Ray were both found guilty of three counts of Aggravated Murder and sentenced to life in prison with parole eligibility after 107 years. The two men were found guilty after shooting and killing Morris, Blair, and their son Tariq in a car parked in front of a home at Pasadena Avenue and Gibson Street. Morris was found shot dead on Gibson St., while Blair and Tariq were both alive when officers first arrived but soon died after being transported to the hospital.



### *State of Ohio v. Richard Sickelsmith*

Richard Sickelsmith was sentenced to five years of probation and ordered to pay restitution after pleading guilty to solid and hazardous waste charges involving the closed Sebring Industrial Plating facility. Sicklesmith was ordered to pay one million dollars in restitution to compensate the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Environmental Protection Agency for removing the hazardous material and restoring the site to a safe condition. Sickelsmith was ordered to pay at least \$400 of restitution per month during the five years of probation. The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency investigation revealed that Sickelsmith once owned the property where approximately 38,000 pounds of hazardous waste were stored. The company didn't have a permit to store the hazardous materials at the facility.



### *State of Ohio v. Dustin Ruitter*

47-year-old Dustin Ruitter was convicted of rape and was sentenced to 77 years behind bars. All of Ruitter's victims were minors. The sexual assaults involved three minors aged 16, 15, and 14. Ruitter was found guilty by a jury of over 70 sex charges involving minors; 33 were felony rape and sexual battery charges. The state called 13 witnesses during the four-day trial. Ruitter will also need to register as a Tier III Sex Offender every 90 days, for the rest of his life, if/when he is released from prison.



***State of Ohio v. Lavontae Knight***

26-year-old Lavontae Knight was sentenced to 58 years to life behind bars for the murder of Trevice Dashawn Harris and the shooting of Quanisha Bosworth. In August, a jury found Knight guilty of several counts, including, two counts of aggravated murder, two counts of attempted aggravated murder (felony of the 1st degree), two counts of aggravated robbery (felony of the 1st degree), two counts of kidnapping (felony of the 1st degree), and one count of felonious assault (felony of the 2nd degree). On December 30, 2018, Knight killed Trevice Harris by shooting him and his girlfriend, Quanisha Bosworth, in a vehicle on the Southside of Youngstown. Knight lured Bosworth and Harris to a home on Ferndale Avenue before kidnapping them at gunpoint. The survivor, Bosworth, explained that Knight and an unnamed accomplice forced Harris and Bosworth into a vehicle before killing Harris and injuring Bosworth. Bosworth then drove to a south-side gas station where police and medical assistance helped the two. Unfortunately, Harris died on his way to the hospital. Soon after, Knight was arrested on aggravated murder and kidnapping charges.

***State of Ohio v. George Hill***

George Hill, 46, of Youngstown, was sentenced to life behind bars with a chance of parole after 15 years served. Hill was found guilty of murdering 36-year-old Jennifer Mullen in May 2020. A jury found Hill guilty of 4 charges including, two counts of murder, one count of felonious assault (a felony of the 2nd Degree), and one count of domestic violence (a felony of the 4th Degree). On May 31, 2020, Jennifer Mullen was found unconscious at her house on Shields Road. When police arrived, Mullen had sustained brutal head injuries and had bruises all over her body. Hill told police that Mullen had an accident after drinking too much. But, upon further investigation, it was clear that Mullen had little to no alcohol in her system at the time of the incident. It was clear that the injuries Mullen sustained were from abuse caused by Hill. Mullen died from her injuries sustained during that deadly confrontation.





## 2022 NOTABLE PAROLE HEARING OBJECTIONS

In January 2021, the Ohio General Assembly enacted Senate Bill 256, which granted parole eligibility to juvenile offenders—those that committed criminal offenses before they reach the age of 18—regardless of the offenses that they committed or the original sentence that was imposed. Despite this fact, the United States Supreme Court specifically recognized in *Graham v. Florida* that “[a] State is not required to guarantee eventual freedom to a juvenile offender \* \* \*. What the State must do, however, is give defendants like Graham some meaningful opportunity to obtain release based on demonstrated maturity and rehabilitation.” *Graham v. Florida*, 560 U.S. 48, 75, 130 S.Ct. 2011, 176 L.Ed.2d 825 (2010). The Supreme Court of Ohio recognized the same: “Graham does not foreclose the possibility that a defendant who commits a heinous crime as a youth will indeed spend his entire remaining lifetime in prison[.]” *State v. Moore*, 149 Ohio St.3d 557, 567-568, 2016 Ohio 8288, 76 N.E.3d 1127.

In 2022, the Mahoning County Prosecutor’s Office **objected to 24 offenders** that were eligible for release through parole. Of those 24, 10 were juvenile offenders, which included Charles Teague, Chad Barnette, and James Goins. The brutality and callousness of their actions demonstrate that paroling these individuals is inconsistent with protecting our community’s welfare and security.



**Charles Teague** was sentenced to a life sentence for the aggravated murder, rape, kidnapping, and aggravated robbery of a 20-year female on June 3, 1979. The night prior, the victim attended a party with three friends, then went to the Beachcomber Bar on Market Street in Youngstown. The victim later became ill and went outside to lay down in her friend’s Thunderbird. About 30 minutes later, her friends noticed that the Thunderbird and the victim were missing. Teague told police that he and his co-defendant David Jacobs went to the Uptown area looking for a car to steal. The pair spotted the Thunderbird with the keys inside and a female sleeping in the backseat. Jacobs drove the three to a location where both Teague and Jacobs raped the victim. The men ordered the victim out of the car, and then shot and killed her. Around 2:30 a.m. on June 3, 1979, Youngtown Police Department located her body lying near Slippery Rock Pavilion in Mill Creek Park. The Parole Board denied Teague’s request for release.



**Chad Barnette and James Goins** were each sentenced to 84 years for the kidnapping, robberies and assaults of several individuals on January 29, 2001. Their first victim was an 83 year old man who they kicked, hit and dragged through his own home, ultimately throwing him down his basement steps and locking him in a fruit cellar. The victim sustained a punctured lung, broken ribs and other broken bones from this attack. Later that same night, Barnette and Goins, one of whom was carrying a firearm, kicked their way into a home occupied by a husband and wife demanding money. These men then dragged the female victim around her house looking for cash, after which time, they struck the male victim, who was confined to a wheelchair, over the head with plates and other objects causing severe head contusions and profuse bleeding. The female victim was hit in the head and legs with a shotgun. The assailants also hit her with a telephone and threatened to kill her. The Parole Board denied both Barnette and Goins' requests for release.



Ohio law only requires that juvenile offenders like those mentioned above receive an opportunity for parole, but does not guarantee their eventual release into society. While all of them are afforded the required opportunity for parole, the violent nature of their offenses, their significant criminal history as juveniles, and their negative behavior while incarcerated in the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction established that none are suitable for release into society.

# CIVIL DIVISION

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The Civil Division serves as Mahoning County's in-house law firm, providing legal services to all of the following:

- All Mahoning County elected officials (including all judges, the Commissioners, the Recorder, the Auditor, the Treasurer, the Engineer, the Sheriff, the Coroner, and the Clerk of Courts);
- All Mahoning County offices including Solid Waste, Soil and Water, Dog Warden, Sanitary Engineer, Tax Map, the Building Department, Mahoning County Department of Jobs and Family Services, and Mahoning County Child Support Enforcement Agency;
- All Mahoning County Boards and Commissions including, the District Board of Health, the Board of Elections, the Budget Commission, the Children Services Board, the Planning Commission, the Mahoning County Board of Developmental Disabilities, the Mental Health and Recovery Board, and the Mahoning County Law Library Resources Board;
- Boards of Township Trustees, Fiscal Officers and Police, Fire, Zoning and Road Departments in all fourteen townships in Mahoning County; and
- Mahoning County Children Services in abuse, neglect and dependency actions filed in Juvenile Court.

## **In 2022, the Civil Division Prosecutors:**

- Drafted and/or reviewed **1,198** contracts;
- Handled **2,353** legal matters, including, the provision of advice and counsel to clients, drafting legal opinions, filing foreclosure complaints and representing Mahoning County and Township officials in litigation and other matters; and
- Attended **854** hearings on matters involving the abuse, neglect or dependency of children in Juvenile Court.

## DELINQUENT TAX DIVISION

The Civil Division also represent the Mahoning County Treasurer in delinquent tax collection. In 2022, **281** foreclosures were initiated to collect delinquent real property taxes and over **1.2 million** dollars were collected on behalf of the Mahoning County Treasurer's Office. Monies derived from real property taxes support the taxing subdivisions of Mahoning County, primarily local schools but also parks, senior services and other Mahoning County operations. In addition, **375** parcels were transferred to the land banks. In general, land banks are a tool designed to assist the Mahoning County Land Reutilization Corporation and local governments that have a Land Reutilization Program, return vacant, abandoned and/or tax-delinquent properties within their jurisdiction into productive use. Additionally, our office filed answers in **14** probate land sales in which the Mahoning County Treasurer may be owed delinquent taxes. Also, our office monitored and, if applicable, filed answers in **162** bank foreclosures wherein the Mahoning County Treasurer's Office was a party. The Prosecutor's Office also represented the interests of the Mahoning County Auditor and Mahoning County Treasurer in **6** appropriation cases filed by the State of Ohio Department of Transportation. Finally, the Delinquent Tax Division, on behalf of the Mahoning County Treasurer mailed letters to owners of tax delinquent properties in an attempt to avoid foreclosures and collect delinquent taxes due.



## NOTABLE CIVIL MATTERS

**Campus of Care:** As previously reported, our Civil Division Prosecutors provided all legal services to the County Commissioners on the transformation of the abandoned Youngstown Development Center into the Campus of Care; a one of a kind wrap-around service center for persons and families in need of mental health or other services. On October 6, 2022, Governor Mike DeWine attended a ribbon cutting to break ground on a new addition that will house The Growth Project, a state program run by a local company, Flying High, Inc. The campus provides residential and workforce training and houses numerous agencies including, I AM Boundless Inc., Compass Family & Community Services, Alta Behavioral Healthcare, TWI (The Workshops, Inc.), Flying High Inc., Cadence Care Network and others. The campus formerly was the Youngstown Developmental Center. DeWine congratulated Mahoning County for its efforts to transform the former state property to a center for much needed services in the Mahoning Valley. He called the project, “a real model for the rest of the state” and he promised to stay involved and committed to the project.

Some of the initial and ongoing legal work provided by the Civil Division on this project included drafting and negotiating a purchase agreement and other documents to facilitate the transfer of the property from the State of Ohio, drafting a Memoranda of Understanding, and lease agreements with tenants and other agencies vital to the project’s success.



# NOTABLE CIVIL MATTERS

**American Rescue Plan:** Our Civil Division Prosecutors provided similar guidance to the County Commissioners and Mahoning County Boards of Township Trustees on their respective expenditures of federal funding provided under the American Rescue Plan (ARP). In 2021 and 2022, our office advised the Commissioners on contracts involving over \$25 million in ARP allocations, including:

- \$125,000 to Oh Wow! The Roger & Gloria Jones Children’s Center for Science and Technology for the expansion of Classrooms and in support of Community project space;
- \$112,000 dedicated to increase A.E.D. access and CPR training in Mahoning County in conjunction with the American Heart Association;
- \$2,986,000 allocation to assist with Sewer Improvements throughout Mahoning County; and
- \$79,000 to Help Network to assist with the purchase of a generator in order to ensure continuity of services during times of disaster.

**OPIOID Settlements:** In 2022, Governor Mike DeWine resolved longstanding litigation against opioid distributors. In 2017, as Ohio Attorney General, Governor DeWine was one of the first in the nation to sue opioid makers and drug distributors for their role in flooding the market with massive amounts of highly addictive opioids. The first payments were received and announced on July 15, 2022. Governor DeWine said, “Ohio’s families and communities have been hit hard by the opioid epidemic.” He further recognized, “while nothing can make whole the losses sustained by Ohioans who have been affected by opioids, it is welcome news that the first payments are going out this week to local governments.”

The distribution of proceeds will be made available to local governments from the OneOhio Recovery Foundation. Ohio will receive payments over the next 18 years and local governments in Ohio will determine how to use the payments, totaling more than \$8.6 million, to best combat the opioid epidemic in their own communities. Mahoning and Trumbull Counties are designated as one region (Region 7) for purposes of the OneOhio Recovery Foundation.

The Civil Division facilitated access to funds held by the OneOhio Recovery Foundation for Mahoning County by assisting in the establishment of the Region 7 OneOhio Collaborative. This collaborative will serve to make project based recommendations for funding to the state-wide OneOhio Recovery Foundation.

In addition to the OneOhio Recovery Foundation, the Civil Division has assisted Mahoning County and its various Townships in receiving other opioid related settlements. Our lawyers have also monitored the National Opioids Settlement web page and ensured timely submission of claimant forms, resulting in the receipt of settlement funds.

# OFFICE NEWS AND INITIATIVES

## 2022 brought change to the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office this year:

- We bid farewell to Prosecutor Paul J. Gains who retired on November 30, 2022 after serving as Mahoning County Prosecutor for 26 years;
- Chief Assistant Prosecutor Gina DeGenova was appointed acting Mahoning County Prosecutor by the Board of Mahoning County Commissioners to serve until a successor Prosecutor was named in January of 2023;
- Public Information Specialist Alan Rodges joined our team to oversee the Office's social media accounts and coordinating community engagement initiatives; and
- Assistant Prosecutor Lori Shells-Simmons was promoted to Senior Attorney. Attorney Shells-Simmons serves as counsel for Mahoning County Children Services.



Our *Speakers Bureau* was quite active this year – offering presentations to many local law enforcement agencies, neighborhood organizations, educational institutions, faith-based groups, and clubs and organizations.



The *Mahoning County Special Needs Registry* continues to register citizens with special needs or cognitive disorders within the County's 911 systems. This program is designed to assist law enforcement and first responders when providing services to residents with special needs during an emergency situation. The registry provides vital information to the responder, such as the registrant's special need(s), emergency contact information, and a physical description and current photograph. Throughout the year, members of our team volunteered at events to raise awareness of this program. So far, 147 individuals are registered. More information about this registry can be found at:

<https://prosecutor.mahoningcountyoh.gov/programs/special-needs-registry/>



# OFFICE NEWS AND INITIATIVES

Members of the **Oakhill Collaborative, Upholders of Restoration**, along with the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office and various other prominent community members sat down together to discuss several issues impacting our residents including crime, mental health and safety. Look for more roundtable discussions to occur in 2023.



Our team celebrated the **171st Canfield Fair** in a new location, outside of the government building. We passed out information on our office, the criminal justice system, and our Special Needs Registry. We were able to connect with so many people and hand out some great information that will continue to help keep our county safe and informed.

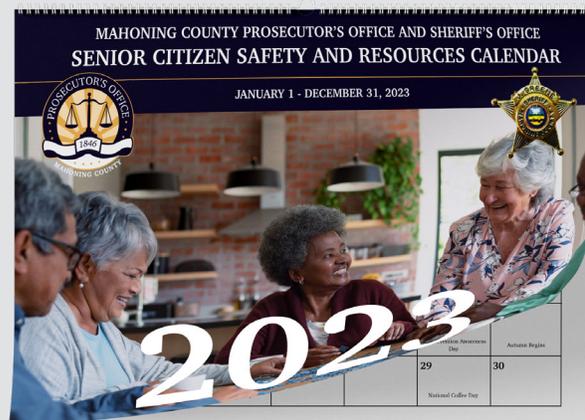


# OFFICE NEWS AND INITIATIVES

During the month of October, in recognition of **Domestic Violence Awareness Month**, the Prosecutor's Office sponsored another donation drive for items and funds to benefit victims of domestic violence. This year, students from South Range, Poland, Canfield and Salem also collected items from their respective schools. With the amazing efforts of these students, nearly 14,000 items and over \$1,000 dollars in cash and gift card were collected and ultimately donated to Sojourner House, Beatitude House and Christina House to benefit victims of domestic violence.



The Prosecutor's Office and Sheriff's Office collaborated to create a **Senior Citizen Safety and Wellness calendar** containing tips on crime prevention, the Mahoning County Special Needs Registry and Sheriff's Office Senior Watch Program, to name a few. The calendars are free of charge and available to anyone upon request, while supplies last.



# OFFICE NEWS AND INITIATIVES

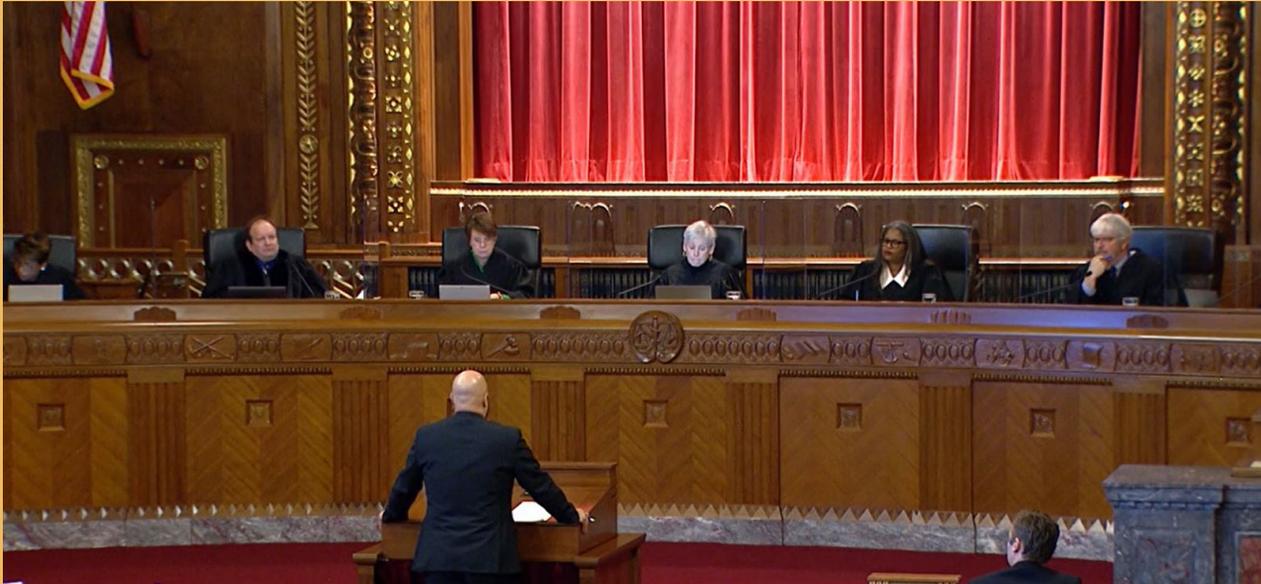
**Township Official Training:** On February 17, 2022, members of our Civil Division developed and presented training for the Township Trustees, Fiscal Officers and other Township staff. The program addressed legal issues common to our Mahoning County Township officials, including: public records, open meetings, employment, workers compensation, and zoning. Also, in 2022, additional unique issues were discussed including application of the American Rescue Plan funding requirements and legal considerations.



**Public Outreach/Boardman Schools:** On October 27, 2022, members of our office including Prosecutor DeGenova prepared and made a presentation to over 300 Boardman Glenwood Junior High 8th Graders. This presentation is part of our office's commitment to community outreach. The presentation, titled, "We Believe in You", focused on how one person's belief in us can change our lives for the positive and how we can be that person for ourselves. The students were enthusiastic and actively engaged in the discussion identifying a person who served to change their life and how they can act to identify and promote their own natural talents. The students also viewed an inspirational video by artist, motivational speaker and author, Clint Pulver, who learned from his own experience that "it's not about being the best in the world; it's about being the best for the world".



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EVENTS





# A FAREWELL TO PROSECUTOR PAUL J. GAINS

On November 30, 2022, we bid a fond farewell to Prosecutor Paul J. Gains as he retired after 26 years as the Mahoning County Prosecuting Attorney.

A native of the Mahoning Valley, Prosecutor Gains attended local schools and is an Ursuline High School graduate. He served a six-year enlistment in the U.S. Air Force Reserve, during which time he became a patrolman with the Youngstown Police Department. During his law enforcement career, Prosecutor Gains received four meritorious service commendations, including the firefighter's lifesaving award. He was also elected by his peers to serve as President of the police union, the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 28. While working a full-time job with YPD, Prosecutor Gains attended and graduated from college at Youngstown State University and later attended the University of Akron School of Law where he earned his Juris Doctor degree in 1982.

Upon earning his law degree, Prosecutor Gains left the police department to practice law. He practiced in both State and Federal Courts, where he focused on criminal defense, the civil defense of police officers, public sector labor law, and the prosecution and defense of personal injury claims. Prosecutor Gains' distinguished legal career earned him the honor of Mahoning County Lawyer of the Year in 1992, along with the late Mary Jane Stevens, for their joint efforts freeing a wrongfully convicted man.

After maintaining a private law practice for 15 years, Prosecutor Gains successfully ran for Mahoning County Prosecutor after learning from clients that cases were being fixed by his predecessor, James A. Philomena. Prosecutor Gains rebuffed offers of assistance from local members of organized crime, and, as a result, a contract was placed on his life to keep him from taking office. On Christmas Eve, 1996, an intruder entered his home, shot him and left him for dead. Fortunately, Prosecutor Gains survived, and was sworn in as the new Mahoning County Prosecutor in January of 1997. His survival resulted in successful state and federal prosecutions of over seventy people, including lawyers, judges, law enforcement officers, and many others for acts of public corruption.

Prosecutor Gains is Mahoning County's longest serving Prosecuting Attorney having been elected by the public in eight contested primary and general elections. During his twenty-six year tenure, Prosecutor Gains is most noted for restoring honesty and integrity to the Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office. Prosecutor Gains instilled a commitment to the victims as well as those charged with crimes by ensuring justice was served by his exceptional team of attorneys and staff in his criminal division. He also expanded service to families and juveniles by increasing the number of dedicated assistant prosecutor's prosecuting child abuse, neglect and dependency cases. And, Prosecutor Gains showed a commitment to the public by building an outstanding full-service law firm of well-qualified attorneys to represent county agencies, county officials, county boards and all fourteen townships.

Prosecutor Gains leaves a great legacy of commendable work ethic and excellent service. We hope that he will continue to impact society and the next generation by sharing his intellect, experience and passion for the law and for justice.



*Paul M.*



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